





GREG LEVANDOWSKI  
Volunteer Biologist

Greg spent January and February working as a volunteer on the feral hog eradication program, assisting the park in trapping

the animals in the North Rosillos area. Using traps baited with fermented corn, they were able to trap and radio collar a single male. The plan is to track this animal using radio telemetry so that other feral hogs can be located, captured and removed from the park.

This is not Greg's first time in Big Bend. He spent three winters here since 1999, working in the park for the USGS on their winter bird abundance and distribution study. His work as a field ornithologist has taken him to many interesting places, including Alaska, Mexico, Jamaica, and California, but Greg's favorite place to work remains Big Bend because of its undeveloped and desolate nature, and the park's friendly community.



For the past month Greg has volun-

teered to work monitoring the park's peregrine falcon population. The peregrines are migrating back to the park after spending the winter in their southern range (as far away as Argentina.) There are currently about 20 nesting sites for peregrine falcons, who return to the same sites each year. Although these birds were "delisted" from the endangered species list in 1999, they are still being monitored by park biologists because they are considered "threatened" in the state of Texas.



Greg monitors their aerie sites and checks for the presence of breeding pairs and behaviors that indicate breeding.

Greg will be leaving us soon and heading off to Alaska. He will be working for the Fish and Wildlife Service monitoring cliff nesting seabirds on the Pribilof archipelago islands of Saint Paul and Saint George, located some 350 miles off the Alaskan coast in the Bering sea.

We certainly value the expertise Greg volunteers to the park, if you see him before he leaves for Alaska, wish him the very best.

**BOOK REVIEW:** The following article is lifted from National Geographic's ADVENTURE Magazine (March, 2004, No. 2, p.24): *The Big Year*; Written by Mark Obmascik`

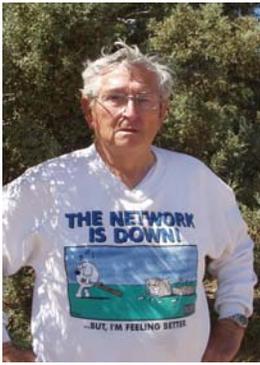
It is easy to make fun of birders. The image we have of them is of little old ladies or retired professors in sensible shoes wandering nature trails to catch a glimpse of, say, the clay-colored robin or the ruby-throated hummingbird to add to their life lists. But as in anything else there are birders, and then there are *birders*, and in the latter category are a bunch of obsessives willing to spend any amount of money or run any risk to bag a species.

The craziest of all are those who go for a "big year" in which birders chase the North American record for the most species in a given year. It means taking 12 months to race around the continent, from the Mexican border all the way out to Attu at the very end of the Aleutian Island chain, then back to New Jersey- in the space of a week, sometimes in little more than the space of a day. As fast, in other words, as a plane can take you. And damn the expense; when you're in Arizona and somebody in Alaska spots a wood

sandpiper, which only shows up in North America once every two or three years, and puts the news out on the birders' hotline, you've got to go. Now.

The big year in Obmascik's book, 1998, was one of the biggest, when El Nino churned up endless storms that blew birds from Asia and South America all over the map, greatly expanding the opportunity to score big. The author is a birder and a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, and this is his first book. What a winner it is. He closely follows three birders, each one more colorful than the last, as they face down mountain lions in Texas' Big Bend National Park, bicycle around Attu in freezing winds and horizontal rain, charter a whirlybird to chase down a Himalayan snowcock under a thick cloud cover in Nevada's Ruby Mountains, and generally have a hell of a time. The writing is swift and compelling, the stories amazing. The big victor logged 270,000 miles, spent untold amounts of money, and saw 745 species of birds. And what did he win? Bragging rights, and not a dime more.

Review written by Anthony Brandt



### DON JANES, VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINARE:

Even before he came to Big Bend National Park, Don Janes had accumulated over 4,000 hours of volunteer service with both the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service. In his "former life", Don was a U.S. government employee whose home in northern Virginia is close to Washington, D.C.. Don became involved in volunteer service because of the idea of "giving back", as he feels that over the years he has received so much more than he has given.

What is Don's special gift to the park and to the National Park Service? Don has been systematically digitizing the park's slide collection, putting thousands of slide images on to computer disks or hard drives in order to preserve them for years to come. Estimates vary, but

most experts feel that 70-200 years is currently the "state of the art" with respect to storing computer images based on today's technology. In their current form, most slides cannot be preserved for a long time because of the slide's construction (a paper mount holding the film image to be displayed). Additionally, the image on the slide gradually fades and loses its intensity. It takes about one minute to digitize each slide. This involves a PC, scanning software and hardware, imaging software, and it is hugely time consuming and labor intensive. Most National Parks have neither the time nor the money to do this and their slide files are deteriorating. Thus Don's contribution is indeed, unique and valuable. Many thanks Don for the long hours of work you've put in.



### Worth visiting nearby, Almost Like Being There The Gage Hotel

Your intrepid traveler spent the night at the Gage Hotel, located in Marathon, Texas. The Gage opened in 1927 as a gathering and watering place for many of the miners and ranchers who lived in the area. Unfortunately, the hotel's owner/developer, Alfred Gage, was unable to enjoy the success of the hotel as he passed away the year that it opened, and it subsequently fell into decades of neglect and disrepair. The building was purchased, updated, renovated and restored by J.P. and Mary Bryan of Houston, Texas, and the rooms in the main hotel and subsequent expansion of the facilities, the Los Portolos Rooms, were opened in 1992.



None of the rooms has a TV or a radio; however, for those of you that just can't live without their sports or favorite shows, a large TV on the cable system is located just off the main living/entry area on the first floor lounge as you check in at the front desk.

Each room is tastefully decorated with either western or Mexican artifacts and is furnished in authentic décor. The price for a room varies depending on whether or not it has a bath or a shared bath and shower (for separate sexes, please) located just down the hall. Additional amenities offered in Los Portales are queen and king sized beds, sitting areas, fireplaces and a wet bar. Potential guests are encouraged to call ahead at (432) 386-4205 or 1-800-884-4243 or to contact [www.gagehotel.com](http://www.gagehotel.com)

on the internet. Considering the authentic décor, the indoor and outdoor fireplaces, mounted trophy game heads abundant in both the hotel and the dining room, and the large outdoor swimming pool, prices are surprisingly affordable and start as low as \$69.00 + tax a night.

The Gage Hotel's Café Cenizio and White Buffalo Cantina will surprise and delight you with the quality of its service, the variety on the wine and drink list, and the extensive selection of grilled prime steaks, roasted game, and other offerings on the menu. For both restaurants reservations are pretty much required unless you are lucky to find an open spot that is not reserved. Hotel guests are also given keys to the Gage Hotel fitness center which is located across the street on U.S. highway 90. Parking for vehicles is located on the street or in the Hotel lot and guests can watch the sunset from one of the hotel's rockers on the front porch. A variety of books, magazines and newspapers is also available in the hotel's lobby. Coffee is also available in the lobby at 6:00 a.m. and the Café Cenizio opens at 7:00 a.m. for breakfast.

In summary, a night's stay at the Gage Hotel and a meal and drink at the Café Cenizio are well worth the \$100.00 or so, for the ambiance and the experience of spending a night immersed in a bye-gone era.



**BOB AND SUSAN HOSTETTER, RIO GRANDE VILLAGE  
CAMPGROUND HOSTS AND PARK SERVICE  
AMBASSADORS**

Bob and Susan are new campground hosts at Rio Grande Village. Last summer, they worked at Olympic National Park, the first time they were Volunteers-In-The-Parks. They expect to return to Olympic this summer as well. They are natives of Washington State, and while their forty foot motor home was new last summer, it is the fourth generation of motor home they have had since they started traveling around the country in a VW camper in 1972. Last year, they spent 5 months in their motor home, while this year they expect to spend 8-9 months of the year either "on the road" or serving as campground hosts in one of the national parks. In addition, they still maintain a residence in Washington State.



While the Hostetters noted that there are many differences between the two national parks (Olympic National Park is in the middle of an "old growth forest" while

Big Bend has the mountains and the desert intersected by the river), the people who camp in the parks are the common element that both of the parks share. They have been very impressed by the "wonderful people who visit the national parks" and how "truly accommodating" those who work here are. They try to be ambassadors for the National Park Service and for America, particularly to people who are not from the USA or people who are new to the parks. They were impressed by the thoroughness of the park's orientation system, the level of professionalism shown by all of the NPS staff (rangers, fire fighters, police officers, clerical and professional staff), and by the sense of community that most parks have. They feel that Big Bend is unique and "special" by the sense of belonging that all of the staff seem to exhibit and they feel honored and privileged to be a part of the "Big Bend family."



**APRIL FOOLS DAY CONTEST.....a.k.a "These boots are made for walking" .....**

We thought that we would have a little fun by sponsoring a contest to celebrate April Fools Day.. no kidding !! Individuals who successfully match the hiking boots pictured below with the boot's owner will be eligible to win a \$25.00 gift certificate to the restaurant at the Chisos Mountain Lodge.

In case of a tie, the winner will be selected in a random drawing picked by John King. There are a couple of additional rules: only one entry per individual for this contest; the winner will be announced in the next newsletter; and HINT. HINT..boots and boot owners can be found in ALL areas of the park where volunteers are assigned. Volunteers may be wearing these boots as well as the regular and seasonal employees of the park, so stay sharp and keep your eyes peeled!! Tear off the bottom of this page and return to Angelina by April 1.

Entrant Name: .....

Choices are Ken Fields, Lisa Carrico, Allison Taylor, Mark Flippo, Kathi Hambly, John Lowe, Eric Leonard, Nancy Dickerson and Tom Ramsay.



Boot C belongs to:.....



Boot A belongs to:.....



Boot D belongs to:.....



Boot B belongs to:.....



Boot E belongs to:.....